

# Key

## WORKFORCE ISSUES

Education pays for woman who lost sight, but heard calling  
Nelson County ATC students restore part of history

Stories on pages 2 & 3

Bimonthly publication of the Cabinet for Workforce Development

### Wanted: Private sector partners to help improve workforce development



As the leading policy board for the commonwealth's workforce development system, the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (KWIB) has recently developed an ambitious strategic plan. Chaired by Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Ken Oilschlager, KWIB has set its sights on:

- ◆ Identifying the skill gaps in Kentucky's labor market;
- ◆ Developing a marketing strategy;
- ◆ Building a statewide, user-friendly, customer-driven infrastructure for workforce development; and
- ◆ Establishing Kentucky as a national leader in workforce development and lifelong learning.

To achieve these goals, the KWIB has formed a new committee structure and hopes to engage more business and industry partners.

The board, in conjunction with the Cabinet for Workforce Development, is sponsoring a Kentucky labor market survey conducted by the University of Kentucky and University of Louisville. Expected by the end of the year, the data are to provide information regarding job vacancies, benefits provided by Kentucky employers, underemployment and the types of credentials employers need.

More information about KWIB activities are available from the board's executive director, Nancy Laprade, at (502) 564-6606 or at [NancyE.Laprade@mail.state.ky.us](mailto:NancyE.Laprade@mail.state.ky.us).

### Program uses experience to help some earn high school diplomas

by Mary Ann Scott, Managing Editor

It's been said that experience is the greatest teacher. For some, life's experiences can even help them earn a high school diploma.

The External Diploma Program (EDP) uses skills that people learn from life experiences and helps them attain the diploma without a return to traditional schooling.

Andy Jones, director of the EDP, who runs the program from the Carl D. Perkins Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center in Thelma, says applicants must meet certain standards.

"You have to be at least 25 years of age, because anyone younger probably hasn't had enough life experience," said Jones. "We also test for certain things. There's a reading test because you must have an eighth grade reading level for EDP. We also check for math ... and writing."

Jones says 90 percent of the people who apply for the program are referred first to adult education providers for remedial work in reading, writing and math.

Once prepared for EDP, participants come to the Perkins Center once a week for one-on-one sessions. They are assigned homework and must complete 65 skills to earn a diploma.

Abilities are demonstrated by completing simulated real-life tasks, such as initiating a consumer complaint about a product or applying for a loan from two banks and deciding which loan would be most suitable.

It may sound easy, but Jones said participants have to follow specific procedures. "When participants write a complaint letter ... we check for content and grammar," explained Jones. "When contacting the banks about a \$2,000 loan, participants must fill out applications, ask each bank 10 questions and figure how interest rates translate into money."



At the age of 77, Louise Church, front right, earned her high school diploma through the EDP. Andy Jones, EDP director, stands next to her.

Credit for skills already learned is another aspect of the program, says Jones. "For instance, one woman who had never been competitively employed, but who had raised four children, handled the banking ... she underwent a home management assessment," Jones explained. "She demonstrated skills required by EDP and earned credit for them."

On the average, it takes about six months for EDP participants to earn a high school degree (done in agreement with the Paintsville Independent Schools). It sometimes takes quite a bit longer, but that is not a problem, says Jones, because the program is self-paced.

Jones said most EDP participants are 35-40 years of age and have discovered that a high school diploma is an important factor in retaining a job or getting ahead. "Most who come for the program, come for employment purposes."

The Perkins Center and its External Diploma Program are part of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, a Cabinet for Workforce Development agency. For more information on the EDP program at the center, call Jones at 1-800-443-2187.

Volume X, Issue 2  
June/July 2001

## INSIDE

2

Woman with limited vision  
finds education lights the way

2

Hiring welfare recipients  
may mean tax credits for employers

3

Nelson County ATC  
students renovate historic boxcar

4

Western Kentucky receives  
\$1.5 million to deal with lay-offs

## Limited Sight, Unlimited Vision

**A seminary student at 55, Maria Johnson, who is legally blind, uses education to answer calling**

by Kim Saylor Brannock, Staff Writer

**I**n more ways than one, Maria Johnson can be considered a non-traditional student. At 55, she is a full-time seminary student, and she is legally blind.

The grandmother of three has discovered that even though her vision is limited, her mind and spirit are not.

Last fall, she moved from Tacoma, Wash., to Lexington to pursue what she describes as a calling from God to minister to people, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Johnson plans to graduate from the Lexington Theological Seminary with a Master's of Divinity degree in May 2003.

Then, at a time when many people her age will be thinking about retirement, Johnson plans to continue her education and earn a doctorate of ministry.

Johnson is finding that the more she delves into her seminary studies, the more she wants to learn. "It's a challenge, but I found it is something I love, and I'm good at," she said.

Johnson said education pays in her life because the more education she has the better equipped she is to serve other

people. "Education opens doors, not just for myself, but for other people who are challenged. The more education I have the more workshops and talks and training I can do," she said. "Education and the spiritual part of my life go together."

She views learning as a life-long endeavor. Over the years, she has returned to school several times to advance herself or pursue new directions in her life. As an adult, a thread has woven its way throughout her life – helping other people.

Johnson understands the importance of helping others because she has been the recipient of the generosity of other people.

As a seminary student, Johnson is required to read a large number of books.

Since coming to the seminary in August 2000, the Lexington Volunteer Recording Unit has taped 15 books for her classes. The recording unit is one of two in the state operated by the Department for the Blind. The other is in Paducah.

Her struggle to obtain an education started in 1952 when she entered the Washington public school system where no programs



*Maria Johnson at the Lexington Volunteer Recording Unit Annual Awards luncheon in April in Lexington. Volunteers have recorded 15 books for Johnson during her first year at Lexington Theological Seminary.*

for students with visual impairments were available. She said her mother and doctor developed a "quasi-program" so that she could go to public school.

At that time, her school did not have textbooks with large print and the only recorded books were on 78-RPM records. It wasn't until ninth grade that some of her textbooks were converted into large print by Washington state penitentiary prisoners using manual typewriters with large fonts.

After high school, Johnson took a secretary program and got a job with Washington state government. After six years as a secretary, Johnson was ready for a new challenge.

She moved into a job where she interviewed clients and determined welfare eligibility. Through her work, Johnson

volunteered time to advocate for people who were disadvantaged.

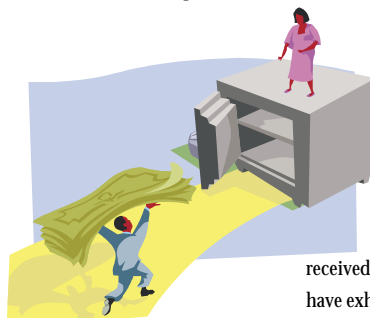
In 1984, Johnson quit her job of 17 years and returned to school. She earned a bachelor of arts degree in political economy from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash. She went on to law school where she decided to become a paralegal. She worked as a paralegal for 15 years.

Now as a seminary student, Johnson continues to find new ground to break. She wants to use her education to help churches identify access problems for people with disabilities and solutions so they can participate in their places of worship.

"Just because you have a disability you still have much to give to your community and others," Johnson said. "We give back to society in service, faith and love."



## Tax credit for employers hiring welfare recipients



Employers who hire welfare recipients may receive a federal tax credit of up to \$8,500 per eligible hire, according to the Kentucky Department for Employment Services, which administers the program.

The Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Tax Credit Program allows employers to claim a federal tax credit for hiring welfare recipients, according to the department, an agency of the Cabinet for Workforce Development.

"This program offers tax relief for employers and a great opportunity for people who need work experience. Employers benefit from the financial incentives of hiring someone who has had difficulty obtaining employment and workers gain practical skills and confidence to enter the job market," said Margaret Whittet, commissioner for the Department for Employment Services.

The WtW program is designed to give valuable work experience to people who historically have had difficulty finding employment. The program targets people who have received welfare payments for at least 18 months since August 1997 or have exhausted their eligibility because of time limits set by welfare reform legislation.

The amount of tax credit is based on wages paid and the length of time the eligible person is employed.

Kentucky employers who want more information about the programs may contact Barbara Gilley at (502) 564-7456. Information also is available at Department for Employment Services local offices throughout Kentucky.

**"This program offers tax relief for employers and a great opportunity for people who need work experience."**

*Margaret Whittet,  
DES commissioner*



## Restoring a Piece of History

**Nelson County ATC students finish long, meticulous renovation of historic French boxcar for museum and learn about its past**

by Mary Ann Scott, Managing Editor

Last month, Chris VerDow's construction class bid farewell to a piece of history that they, and several classes of students before them, helped restore.

VerDow, who teaches a carpentry and wood technology class at the Nelson County Area Technology Center, and the students who have taken his class for the past two and a half years restored an 1880s European boxcar that has a WWII connection.

The boxcar is now on display at the Kentucky Railway Museum in New Haven, where the story began. "I was looking for a project for my students, something 'real-world,'" said VerDow. "... the curator of the museum said they had a boxcar that needed renovating."

Besides its antiquity, this boxcar was special because it was a Merci Train (or Gratitude Train) boxcar, one of 49 boxcars that France sent to the United States in 1949 to express appreciation for the United States' defense of France during WWII and for post-war relief efforts.

Each boxcar was laden with gifts. Kentucky's car contained lace, statues, books, porcelain, and according to a Courier-Journal report at the time, "thousands of humble little gifts worth more in sentiment than intrinsic value."

When the boxcar was moved from the museum to the area technology center it was in need of serious repair. "We replaced the wood from floor to roof. It was a tremendous amount of work," said VerDow.

With materials supplied by the railway museum and using photographs of Maryland's restored Merci Train boxcar, VerDow said students were able to closely recreate how the boxcar originally looked. "When we got the car, it had a flat roof on it ... but we realized the roof had been replaced at some point because photographs

showed these boxcars had a bowed roof. So that's what we put on," said VerDow.

Not all answers came so easily, said VerDow. "This was a tremendous troubleshooting project. There were no instructions that came with this," VerDow explained. "We took photos of the car before reassembling it. We had to plan things out. In so many class projects, it's like Step 1, Step 2 ... on this you had to make your own plans."

Students in other classes lent their talents. The center's welding class repaired metal components and recreated missing hardware and the drafting class created drawings for students to follow as they built needed parts.

VerDow said two Nelson County High School classes tackled one of the most difficult aspects of the restoration: recreating 40 shields that represented various French provinces. "The

high school's technology education class

scanned the Maryland boxcar's shields and then blew them up to the correct size," said VerDow.

"Then the art class recreated them ... the art class did a beautiful job on the plaques."

VerDow said that while students gained invaluable experience by restoring the boxcar with no "how-to" manual, there were great residual benefits: a history lesson and a chance for high school and ATC students to work together.

"The students actually could touch this and realize that this was something that had some history," said VerDow. "One teacher brought in a WWII veteran to talk with some of the students involved in the project."

VerDow said high school students who worked with his and other ATC classes gained a greater

understanding of what the center teaches. "There are old perceptions about ATC classes being like the old 'vo-tech' schools," VerDow said. "I think this project helped change that (perception)."

VerDow was so pleased with the boxcar project that he has "trained" his sights on another railroad relic in need of work. "The museum has a 1920s railcar that needs renovation," said VerDow.

"This would be a five-year project ... it's just a tremendous way to learn."

More information about the Nelson County ATC boxcar project is on the Web at [http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/pubinfo/Kentucky\\_Teacher/March99KYT/Pg6.html](http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/pubinfo/Kentucky_Teacher/March99KYT/Pg6.html). For more Web information on the Merci Train, go to <http://www.rypn.org/Merci/>.



Top left: The boxcar's state two years ago. Above: The renovated Merci Train boxcar is ready to be moved to the Kentucky Railway Museum for display. Nelson County students stand before the car, originally a gift from France to the United States for post-WWII relief efforts.

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**"This was a tremendous troubleshooting project."**

*Chris VerDow,  
Nelson County ATC teacher*

## Western Kentucky receives \$1.5 million to mitigate impact of lay-offs

The Cabinet for Workforce Development provided \$1.5 million to the West Kentucky Workforce Investment Board to assist in dealing with lay-offs by area businesses, Governor Paul Patton recently announced in Murray.

The governor noted announcements of lay-offs affecting nearly 2,100 Kentuckians in the 17-county Purchase-Pennyrile area. The largest lay-offs have been announced by Mattel Inc., Murray, 1,200 employees; Ingersoll-Rand, Mayfield, 328 employees; and SuperValu, Greenville, 175 employees.

"Losing a job is one of the most traumatic situations a person can face," Patton said. "A chief responsibility of state government is to provide assistance to people so they can improve their lives.

"We're glad to be able to work with the West Kentucky Workforce Investment Board and local elected officials to provide support to connect these Kentuckians back to the workforce."



*Cabinet for Workforce Development Secretary Allen Rose, left, and Bill Gaunce, commissioner of the cabinet's Department for Training and ReEmployment, present Sheila Clark, director of the West Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, with a \$1.5 million check to help with area lay-offs.*

The funding, provided by the Department for Training and ReEmployment through the Workforce Investment Act, will be used in One-Stop Career Centers throughout the Purchase-Pennyrile area to provide services such as job search assistance, courses on topics including interviewing techniques and preparing resumes, and assessments to determine interests and educational levels. Funding will also be available for education and training for individuals who qualify.

## New computers for Adult Education's mobile unit



Ten new computers were installed recently in the Department for Adult Education and Literacy's (DAEL) mobile unit.

The computer upgrade allows for more advanced software use and provides more desktop space.

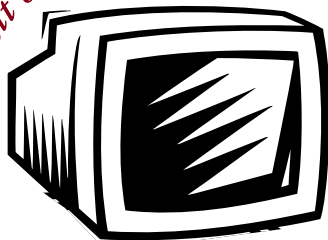
The unit travels to various Kentucky manufacturers to help workers upgrade basic skills and prepare for the Kentucky Manufacturing Skill Standards certification.



*Top: D.J. Begley, who is the training and development coordinator for the Department for Adult Education and Literacy's eastern Kentucky region, adjusts one of the new computers in the department's mobile unit. Above: DAEL's mobile unit travels across the state to help manufacturing workers upgrade basic skills and prepare for new certification standards.*

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